



Faculty of Economics and Business

**NETIQUETTE IN ELECTRONIC BUSINESS
COMMUNICATION:
A STUDY IN KUCHING**

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The advance developments of technology have brought us the interconnected of computer mediated communication which is called the Internet. Rapid diffusion of the Internet throughout the world enhanced interactions among government, business and consumers thus enlarging the size and accessibility of business gain around the world. The evolving of Internet in incredible pace thus shows how the technology helps in extend human capabilities to connect with the other parts of the world.

The increasing number of organizations involved in conducting their businesses in cyberspace initially has form immense business cyber communities. Thus evokes the importance of Netiquette which is agreed by Preece (2004) as “*Etiquette online is not just nice to have, it is necessary*”. In other words, as the use of electronic communication medium such as email as a way to communicate becomes popular and increase in number, it is important to use the technology wisely and with etiquette.

Netiquette is a term which described by Shea (1994) as a set of rules for behaving properly online. Even in virtual world, there also exist some sort of rules to guide and control the behavior of virtual communities. On the other hand, even though Netiquette is said to be the rules to guide behaviors in virtual environment but it is not an official rules as there are no penalty and no official body to punish those who

violate the rules. But the way people conduct their behavior online will reflect their image and affect the harmonious of virtual environment. Although the netiquette is still a new term in virtual world, but the issue has become popular and frequently asked and even argued among virtual communities (Kallos, 1996).

Internet is an integral defining instrument for data communication and part of data processing environment in many organizations. In Malaysia, it has become the catalyst for the growth of the nation's commercial and industrial sector. As the world transformed into information age, business organizations have to struggle to generate more information faster than others in order to become competitive. To survive, the ability to get the latest and useful information in the right place at the right time is essential to show their power (Rowe II, 1995). But as people struggle searching for information, human being often and always forgot about the way they conduct themselves online. For the purpose of this research, the main focus is on employees' online etiquette especially in using electronic mails. This is important as the ways employees behave online particularly in electronic mail writings will reflects the attitudes, norms and the values of the organization where they work at large. Furthermore, the lack of understanding and practice of Netiquette may weaken sociability and even destroying online communities which means the online world may degrade to a point where people are no longer want to participate (Preece, 2004; Kallos, 1996).

Just as what human being usually concern about their first impression regarding their behavior and manners when conducting face to face meeting and communication so

thus applied when conducting electronic communication. A positive communication process which ends with satisfaction by both parties is essential to keep on long term business relationship and especially widening the capabilities to communicate with diversified business companions online. Therefore, the awareness and understanding of appropriate Netiquette in electronic business communication will enhance today's instant communication process (Spinks, Wells and Meche, 1999). While there have been a significant number of researches conducted to study about online business such as issue of ethics and security; however there are still limited study that focused on business Netiquette and its aspect to organization business performance.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The development of electronic communication medium such as email has made possible for a message to be delivered within seconds of their transmission and the receiver or receivers can read the message at their own convenience, at any place and time. The ease and speed to transmit messages has started to change the writing technique and formality of the written communication (Gargano, 2004). The volatile of electronic communication writing form has lead to increasing number of messages that may be misunderstood and misinterpreted between the two senders and receivers. As Preece (2004) mentioned that when the norms of etiquette are violated, discomfort, confusion, annoyance, embarrassment and even fear may occur between senders and receivers as there is lack of physical and emotional interactions. This problem does not only happen to the "newbies" of electronic communication but also to the old timers or frequent users of electronic communication.

The next issue in Netiquette is that people tends to send or pass messages just to everyone. Some individual has the intention to pass the “interesting important” messages just to everyone, but by right they should examine and “think before send” whether the messages are relevant or important to everyone in the mailing list. But as the technology is “free” and fast so most individual who are likely to makes things quick and easy would sending the messages to everyone. This action may cause annoyance to some party as the message are just like a “junk mail” or “spam” for them while interrupt and waste receivers’ time and bandwidth to delete unwanted messages. In this fast transformed telecommunication world, it is important to send the right information to the right organization and customers, realizing that information is an increasingly valuable asset that must be managed with the same care and attention as organization’s finance, buildings and machines (Rowe II, 1995).

Hence, the study of Netiquette among employees especially in competitive and ever changing business environment nowadays is important as this group is the one who are directly conduct business with customers and as a guideline for organizations to avoid lost of opportunity such as business contract and even job due to improper email habits by employee themselves (Kallos, 1996).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

General objective:

The general purpose of this research project is to examine the attitude and behavior of employees in terms of business communication with Internet. For this research purpose, the type of electronic business communication will highlight only on electronic mail (email).

Specific objectives:

1. To study the experience and perception of employees with electronic business communication.
2. To study the awareness of employees on Netiquette in business communication.
3. Based on current literature, review how proper Netiquette practices may affect the dynamic of business relationship and network.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The significance of this research project is to shed light on the users of electronic communication such as email and other electronic business communication medium to be aware and understand the appropriate business Netiquette. The result of this research which elicit both quantitative and some qualitative data in terms of employees' awareness and practices of email Netiquette will give a guideline and provide preliminary overview whether there is a need to improve the awareness of netiquette among employees as the users of email. Understanding and awareness of Netiquette among employees will help in developing effective in conducting electronic communication, productivity and competitiveness.

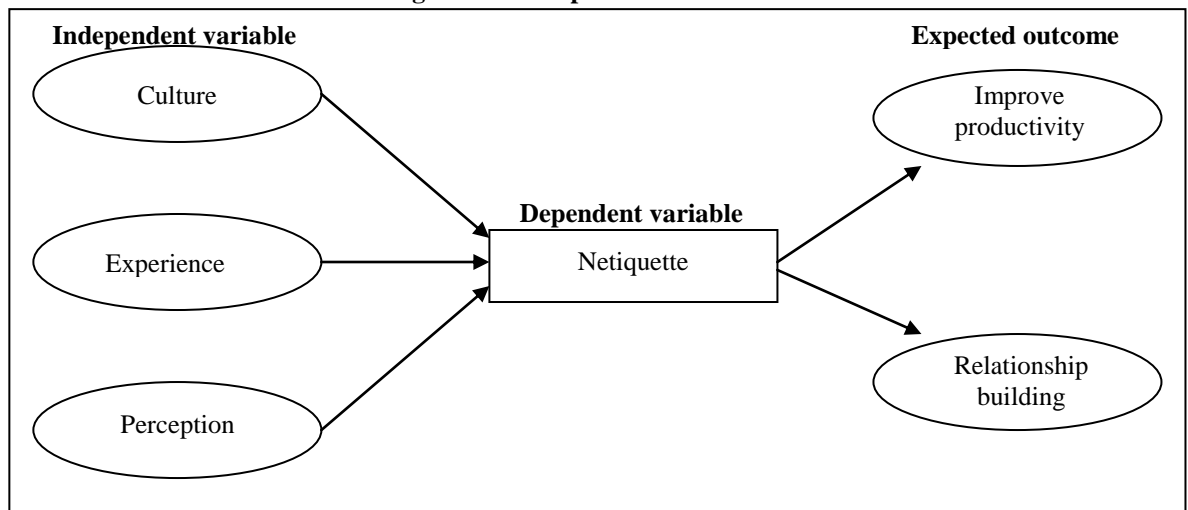
This research project also can be value as a guideline to organizations and in most cases apply equally to other information services in other sectors in other places or countries to assist them in practicing appropriate behavior and enabling them to improve the effectiveness in the usage of electronic business communication as their daily communication tools with customers and business companions in which work is increasingly carried out within a network and virtual environment.

If the result of this study shows low of Netiquette awareness and practices among employees studied then recommendation of guideline and steps to improved awareness of netiquette is essential. Finally, it is hope that further research would be done on this issue and build beyond the limitations of this research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on Figure 1, the research will examine the relationship between three independent variables which are culture, experience and employees perceive ease of use and perceived usefulness in using email in relation with practices of Netiquette in email (dependent variable).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Culture

Culture can be defined as *“the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”* (Hofstede, 1997, p.5). Many studies have done about the impact of cultural differences from different country especially between the east and west countries have on organization communication generally (Chung, 1994; Hawrysh and Zaichkowsky, 1990). Thus, this factor is important and relevant in study on how cultural differences will have impact on practices of Netiquette. For example, if there is huge differences in organization or nation culture will be hard for user to practice Netiquette.

Experience

Based on Channel Expansion Theory, Zmud and Carlson (1999) discussed about the experience of users in using and communicating experience with their correspondent in using communication technology. In this theory, Zmud and Carlson proposed that the more experience and knowledge individual have in using a communication technology, the richer they consider it to be and the more effectively the person able to communicate with it. In this theory, the researchers conclude that the chances of email messengers being misunderstood will be less if the communicating partners know each other and the organization well, and have an appreciation of the capabilities of the technology.

Perception

Based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by Davis (1989) have points out two particular beliefs which are *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use*. For this research purpose will examine whether *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use* in email will influence an individual in practicing of good Netiquette. For example, whether a person will easily practices Netiquette if the individual have positive perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use in using email for communication purpose.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The data collecting period for this research project is a one year (two semesters) project. This research will focus on business organizations as electronic mail is the common feature of electronic business communication used in today's business process. The focus respondents for the research survey will be the employees in organization around Kuching area whereby each individual have internet access computer in their workplace whereby in their routine work will involve electronic business communication among their colleagues, employers, organizations and customers.

THESIS OVERVIEW

The next chapter (Chapter 2) in this research paper will discuss about the current published online and offline literature review about proper and appropriate etiquette on the net particularly the electronic mail. While, in Chapter 3 will discuss about method for research purpose in terms of data collection techniques and data analysis. In Chapter 4 will report about the result and findings through quantitative and qualitative proving methods. The Chapter 5 will provide explanation and discussion about the result of the research. The final chapter which is Chapter 6 will conclude and summarize the results of the research.

CHAPTER 2:

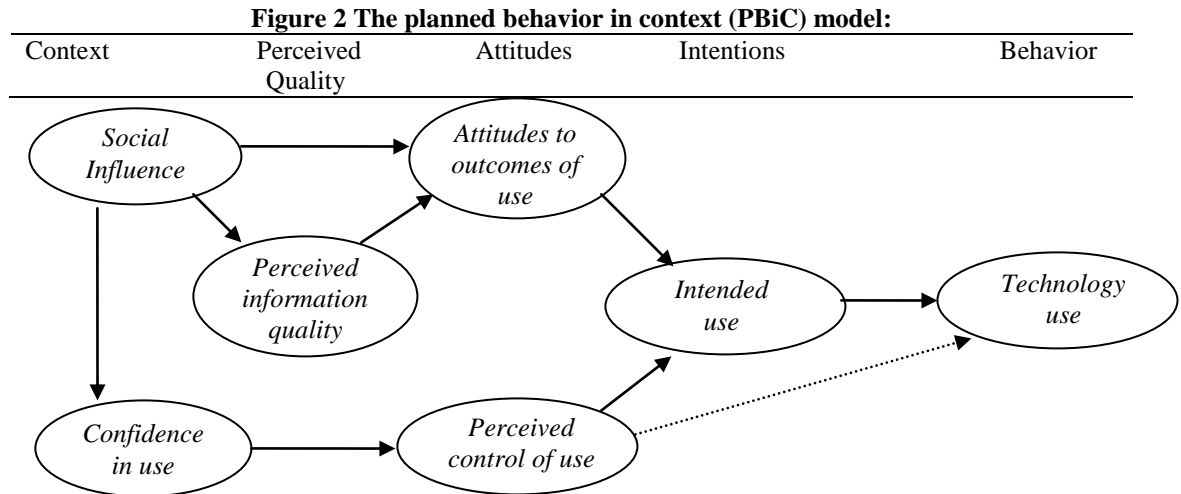
LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review the current literatures done by previous researchers. The specific type of technology used as an example in this research is the electronic mail (email) as it is an easy technology to install, common, low cost and the most basic electronic text-based communication medium used by employee between their colleagues, upper management, external stakeholders and customers (Sallis and Kassabova, 2000). The best place to find current researchers literature regarding to proper and appropriate email Netiquette is no other than via Internet itself (Spinks, Wells and Meche, 1999).

TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE AT WORK

Information Technology (IT) has introduce new IT solutions to replace the old existing IT system or non IT system for achieving the same goals and solving the same problem which has been widely used in supports operations, management and decision making in the business productively (Thong and Yap, 1996). The rate of adoption and usage of IT by employees is affected by the amount of training provided and equipment by their organization and this group of people would likely accept and support IT adoption if they are convinced of the benefits that they can gain and perceived of ease to use of IT (Attewell, 1992; Davis, 1989). The Klobas's planned behavior in context (PBiC) model in Figure 2 can be applied to shows the adoption of technology by users:



Source: Klobas and Clyde. (2001), p. 62

Klobas's PBiC model (Klobas, 1997; Klobas and Morrison, 1999) explains how networked information used as a function of intentions to use the information resource which in this context refers to email technology. Intentions derived from attitudes towards the user perceived of the benefits, consequences of use and perceived of control of the technology. If the user has positive perception on the technology and the benefits gain from it, the user will be eager to learn more on how to use the technology even better. All of these influences are affected by social context of use, such as organization support, expectation of colleague and peer group influences and media. Thus attitudes will therefore reflect users' perception on the quality of information retrieved from the technology used.

THE EMERGING OF INTERNET

Nowadays, the Internet has already functioning as a factor of mass media, and it plays increasingly important roles as a communication medium rather than the previous informational and recreational roles (Markus, 1990; Hung, Jun and Sang, 2004). Internet can be defined as an electronic of computer networks which provide millions of resources worldwide by using a standardized Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) (Internet Society, 1995). Based on Malaysia Internet Usage Statistics and marketing reports that about 36.7% of population or 10, 040, 000 of population connected to the internet which reported in the year 2005 (Internet World Stats, 2006). Markus (1990) study that when the proportion of Internet users reached over 20% of the whole population, the Internet settled down as a factor of mass media and no longer as a communication medium for only a small number of people. The population of Internet users in Malaysia will keep on increasing as wide spread of availability of facilities and other incentives especially from Malaysia Government's plan, *Multimedia Super Corridor* (MSC) that encourage the usage of internet in Malaysia. The encouragement and incentives results many businesses are now connected to the internet. The encouraging growth of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) expenditure by sectors can be shown in Table 1:

Table 1: ICT expenditure by sector For the year 1995 and 2000 (selected sectors only) (RM million)			
Sector	1995	2000	Average annual growth rate (%)
Banking & Finance	1026	3723	-4.2
Manufacturing	494	4641	19.0
Government	380	2062	6.9
Telecommunication	n.a	2323	n.a
Professional ICT & other services	125	236	13.5
Education & research	114	1008	15.6
Transportation	114	1147	9.1

Source: *Computer Industry Association of Malaysia (PIKOM). (2001)*

Since 1994 the Internet and the World Wide Web has started to dominate nearly all expectation about the future of technology and further, the future of business. The short cycle of change in hardware, software and communication shows it only would last till three months the most which is different from traditional business cycle that lasted for years (Papows, 1998). Thus, to sustain competitive advantage in future business environment, it requires strong awareness about current technology and good expectation of the future. One of the ways is to have good knowledge and future prediction about the internet itself. A study by Porter (1995) stated that Internet is an important element and tools to enhance and integrate links among and between business key players especially in terms of value chain. The emergence of World Wide Web (WWW) has brought many changes in the field of computer-mediated communication (CMC) which stayed as a favorable medium to send text-based simple messages.

COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION (CMC)

The term of CMC was first established by Hiltz and Truff in their literature, “The Network Nation: Human Communication via Computer” published in 1978 which according to their study, CMC refers as the computer mediated communication process which enables one to one, one to many, and many to many communication with written messages. A study by Baym (1995), the purpose of CMC has gradually transformed from information delivery to relationship building. Thus gradually changes human traditional face-to-face interpersonal communication.

Rosengren and Windahl (1986) has study that face-to-face communication is the best channel in achieving and meet both parties’ interactive desires as the one way communication process is enriched by instant interpretation. But one of the reasons what makes an individual becomes motivated to establish and continue interpersonal relationship via CMC is because of dissatisfaction in face-to-face communication due to personal and environmental conditions. In other word, the less people are satisfied with face-to-face relationships, the more they are likely to use CMC. Although face-to-face communication can have direct feedback from both party however in online communication it also applicable in meeting the needs likeable only with polite texts (Ku, 2001). Furthermore, with the current business environment which has many business counterparts from different parts of the world, it is impossible to make a face-to-face meetings and communication nowadays.

The most interesting feature of CMC as a computer transmission and store functions is its non-simultaneously communication whereby it allow to have some time before

showing one's opinion (Kim, 1990) and the effective convenient of time. CMC also can reduce the isolation and physically employees and lead to greater commitment, but as more information can be easily access and achieve may create problems of authority, control and influence with in work place environment.

One of CMC mode of communication the electronic mail (email) was originate as an additional feature of the first scale computer network ARPANET in the late 60's and early 70's where internet was first created and used to enable the US Federal Government for research, defense application and data sharing. Although there are many forms of CMC exist, but today email prevails as a widely accepted and is a common feature in workplaces as a means of business communication. Organizations has grown dependent upon CMC and this can be proved in the rapid expansion of email, marketing and purchasing through Internet and use of company extranets, Internet relay chat, and fully integrated electronic communication between organizations (Bean, Boles and Cano, 2003).

Email in general has affects our human life style, in terms of time convenience, the way people interacts with each other and many more. In business world, email has made several major changes in the way business functions. For example, with email it makes possible for employees to contact powerful people directly in their organization and with the advancement of technology and system makes it easy to send mail to everyone internally and externally of the organization (Shea, 1994). Thus, this shows email gives a voice to the voiceless and reduces status imbalance (Sproull and Kiesler 1992; Bishop and Levine, 1990). A study done by Olsten

Company on corporate executives in North America have revealed that email was considered to give the greatest impact on productivity by 64 percent (Caldwell, 1998). Another study on experienced computer personnel felt that email system could be used effectively for generating idea, resolving conflict or disagreement, social reinforcement and for negotiation (Hirtz and Turoff, 1981; Rice and Case, 1983).

Business emails are often misinterpreted and misunderstood by business players (the receivers) as there is no convention exists in ways in writing a proper email (Taylor, 2001). This scenario may due to human's perception of the informality and lack of standard of using email to conduct business (Baron 1998a; Du Bartell, 1995; Harrison, 2000; Shortis, 2001; Taylor, 2001). Access to email may lead to information overload especially to the top level of organization, this is due to upward flowing of messages make it possible for employees to connect with their authority (Kerr and Hiltz, 1982). The unawareness of employees regarding email which sent and receive through company email system as private own by employees is also another limitation of free email usage. Company officials have the legal rights to read and monitor what have been sent through their company email system without employees' acknowledgement. With this new way of communicating through email comes the responsibility of learning to communicate and use the technology effectively and it is important to look at some guidelines that have been done by researchers on this issue (Spinks, Wells and Meche, 1999).

Although it is subjective in judging the degree of professionalism in email content as some say it is essential to display professionalism in writing as it reflects the senders image while others argue that as email is intended for quick respond and informal communication so it should not write in the same standards as to other message media (Spinks, Wells and Meche, 1999). However, Gargano (2004) has stress the important of formality and professionalism value in email writing as email are just as permanent as hard copy paper documents that bears and may be read by more individuals. People get to know the sender through their writing. Another consideration that should be bare in mind is that messages can be quickly and easily forwarded to anyone, anytime and anywhere (Hambridge, 1995). The messages may be forwarded and read by the sender's employers, potential business partners and even to irrelevant individual by just one click of the mouse.